

Australia: Thousands rally for Gaza in nationwide demonstrations

Our reporters
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Thousands of people across Australia again demonstrated on the weekend against the Israeli military assault on the Palestinian people in Gaza. About 6,000 people marched in both Sydney and Melbourne, while smaller rallies were organised in other cities.

The weekend protests—the third held in Australia since the attack on Gaza began late last year—highlighted the deep anger felt by ordinary people towards the criminal actions of the Israeli government and military that has seen some 1,300 Palestinians killed. Homemade banners and placards included: “Palestine don’t despair, Australians care,” “Palestine you are not forgotten,” “Stop the holocaust in the Gaza ghetto,” “Jews and Arabs—Refuse to be enemies” and “Please Israel; do not go the Nazi way.”

Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has issued his unwavering support for the Olmert government throughout the offensive on Gaza and is an accomplice in Israeli war crimes. (See “Labor government backs Israeli assault on Gaza”) Protest organisers nevertheless continued their efforts to block the development of an independent political movement in opposition to the government and promoted the illusion that the Labor Party could be forced to change its policies if only sufficient pressure was brought to bear.

In Melbourne, organisers with the Australians for Palestine organisation told demonstrators that they had asked numerous parliamentarians to address the rally, but not a single Labor “left” had accepted. This telling response underscored the utter futility of appealing to Rudd and the Labor Party. Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young nevertheless focused her remarks on an appeal to the prime minister to have the “guts and courage” to condemn Israeli violence.

A different note was struck in a powerful speech by Dr. Peter Slezak, an academic philosopher and member of Independent Australian Jewish Voices.

“History is being rewritten even as it happens,” he said. “It is a lie that Israel is defending itself. There are no Palestinian F16

jets bombing Israel. There are no Palestinian tanks in the streets of Tel Aviv. The assault on Gaza is not a war but a cowardly act of terrorism. It is perpetrated by the most sophisticated military force against a defenceless population. The casualty figures are sufficient evidence of this crime against humanity. But this is not how it is presented in our media or by our own politicians who endlessly, uncritically repeat the official lies of Israeli propaganda. Under the guise of balance, the victims are blamed for their suffering and they have no voice...

“I am here today because I share a motivation with many Jews around the world. My 83-year-old mother is a survivor of the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz. I grew up with her questions—why didn’t anyone help the Jews? Why didn’t anyone else care? And why did the world allow it to happen? These are the same questions we must ask today about the crimes against Palestinians.

“I am here because the state of Israel does not represent all Jews. If we have learned the real meaning of the slogan ‘never again’ from the Second World War, we can’t remain silent when crimes are being committed in our name. We must universalise the tragedy to include others in our moral universe and to recognise our shared humanity with the Palestinians.

“The Nazis made Jews wear a yellow Star of David to stigmatise them and persecute them, and I grew up with an immensely moving image of other people, not Jews, like the King of Denmark and other people, who showed their humanity by wearing the yellow star to symbolise their solidarity with the Jewish victims of persecution. This is the spirit in which I am wearing a Palestinian badge today and the spirit in which many Jews and others around the world send to the Palestinians... Right now we are all Palestinians.”

Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party distributed recent statements and *World Socialist Web Site* perspectives, including “A socialist answer to the Gaza crisis”, at a number of the demonstrations.

WSWS reporters also interviewed several protestors.

Lina Mimawiyeh attended the Melbourne demonstration with her sister. They carried a banner they made which featured graphic photographs of dead and injured Palestinian civilians, including children.

“We wanted to put some photos of the children that are dead and put some facts down to let everyone know what’s really happening,” she explained. “And the difference between the Palestinian and Israeli death tolls, and the fact that it’s not a fair war. It’s not even a war—it’s a massacre. You don’t see any of these images on TV. If you don’t research it yourself and get it from the Internet, straight from sites that are coming out of Palestine, then you don’t get to see any of this.

“There are babies with bullet wounds. In Gaza’s hospitals the doctors have been saying that they have been shot at from close range—young children with bullets in their heads and their chests, being murdered at close range. To kill one person that they claimed was a Hamas leader, the Israeli army killed 15 other people, his family members. So they’re not just going after the so-called terrorists, they’re going after everyone and anyone. These are war crimes...

“They say there is now a ceasefire but I saw a report on Arab TV that Israel is still attacking even after the ceasefire. And the Israelis have previously used ceasefires to simply prepare for their next offensive.

“My parents are Lebanese. The Israeli military did the same thing in Lebanon. My family lived through the 2006 war. No one in my family was actually injured, but people we know were. My family is from a small village; it was the larger urban areas that were especially targeted. But anything that attached our family village to anything else—bridges, roads—everything was destroyed, so everyone was struggling at that time.

“The US, Australia, everyone, they’re all supporting Israel. I mean, Barack Obama was supposed to give us hope but he has made comments about how he is supporting Israel, how he has always backed Israel, and how anyone who attacks Israel is his enemy. Everyone needs to open their eyes. The whole world’s asleep—no one’s doing anything about it. There are protests—the people are saying no to the war, but these governments aren’t budging.”

At a rally held in the New South Wales city of Newcastle last Wednesday, the WSWS spoke with Year 12 school students Kevin Smith and Josh Head.

“The Israelis would like everyone to believe that the invasion

is all about stopping Hamas rocket attacks that in fact are largely ineffectual,” Kevin said. “If this really was the question, there are many other ways that this issue could be have been addressed other than a full scale invasion that has claimed hundreds of lives. I believe the real motive behind the operation is to remove Hamas and to completely destroy an opposition movement to what Israel is doing to the Palestinians, not only in the Gaza but also in the West Bank.”

“This attempt to repress all opposition is also taking place in Israel itself where the government just banned two Arab parties from standing in elections even though both of them already have members in the Israeli parliament. I think that while many governments around the world are shocked at what is unfolding in Gaza, they do not come out and condemn Israel because they view it as a useful ally against any potential opposition from other countries in the region to their operations in the Middle East.”

Josh said he had not previously been involved in politics but had now attended two protests against the invasion of Gaza.

“I came along because I have become really concerned about what is happening in Gaza and because I know I need to learn more about the situation,” he said. “I was shocked to hear about the type of weapons now being used by Israel forces in the Gaza such as phosphorous bombs. There is even talk that depleted uranium shells are being used. Using such weapons in any situation is illegal and I think a real war crime. The fact that the Israel army had been informed by the UN that the school was a refuge for ordinary citizens, for children and women but then deliberately targeted, it is really shocking...

“The major powers talk about a two-state solution. This might be sound good in theory but in practice you can see the result. Gaza is like a prison and has been completely cut off, resulting in terrible hardship for its citizens. Now you have the war and the destruction and deaths because Israel disagrees with Hamas being elected by the people. I agree that it would be better to have no borders and for ordinary people throughout the Middle East to be united, but I don’t know if this could happen.”



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